

**DISABILITY COMMISSION  
ADVISORY BOARD MEETING**

Meeting Link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81008934107>

Wednesday December 8th 2021  
5:30-7:00p.m.

**Meeting Agenda**

- Meeting Called to Order
- Introductions
- Approval of November Minutes
- Presentation – **Mayor’s Office of New Urban Mechanics, Yo Deshpande**
- Presentation – **Me2 Music, Caroline Whiddon**
- Chair’s Report – **Olivia Richard**
- Member Spotlight
- Commissioner's Report – **Kristen McCosh**
- Announcements
- Old Business
- New Business
- Public Input
- Adjournment

**Meeting Minutes**

**Attending:**

Zary Amirhosseini  
Jerry Boyd  
Paul Caron  
Elizabeth Dean-Clower  
Alice Fisher  
Wesley Ireland  
Dusya Lyubovskaya  
Juan Carlos Ramirez-Tapia

Olivia Richard  
Yardley Sanchez

**Absent:**

Carl Richardson

**November Meeting Minutes:**

Motion to approve the minutes made by Member Lyubovskaya, seconded by Member Dean-Clower. No discussion. Unanimous approval.

**Votes Taken**

None

**Other Decisions Made**

None.

**Issues Discussed**

**Department Presentation One: Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics (MONUM), Yo Deshpande**

- The MONUM is a small civic research and design lab that works with departments on small projects to make the city safer, more accessible, and more fun. Previous projects include the 311 app and Project Oscar the community composting program.
- Deshpande presented on a topic that has recently come to MONUM's attention - personal delivery devices (PDDs) which are small autonomous vehicles with room for storage. They operate primarily on sidewalks and are designed to deliver food and packages to individuals.
- A company, Starship, wishes to deploy PDDs in Boston. The City wants to be proactive on this issue and establish regulations from the beginning.
- Deshpande started by explaining how the PDDs operate, then described the regulatory context and example regulatory schemes from other cities. Next, Deshpande described the current proposed review process and pilot parameters. Last, he asked for the Advisory Board's reactions and input.

- PPDs - these small electric powered devices are autonomous. They have a storage capacity for food, drinks, or medicines. They use sensors, distance cameras, and radar to navigate. Companies usually also have human drivers who can take control of the PPDs remotely if needed.
- About 2 - 2.5 feet tall and 2 feet wide. They weigh less than 100 pounds and often carry cargo under 50 pounds. The exception is FedEx's PDD which is 5 feet tall and carries 100 pounds in cargo. They usually travel 3-5 miles per hour on sidewalks, although larger ones can travel on roadways up to 15 mph.
- They have become popular as a way to reduce emissions from deliveries (by decreasing congestion on the roads), and have been especially popular for food during the COVID-19 pandemic to avoid person-to-person contact.
- More than 10 states have passed legislation since 2017, most leaving the details to municipalities. From a regulatory perspective, there is an on-going debate about whether to treat PDDs as vehicles or pedestrians. Most states have declared them pedestrians. There was recent legislation discussed in the MA legislature, although it didn't pass. Jurisdictions across the US have come down on both sides of that debate.
  - Many cities saw them deployed without advance notice or regulation and safety concerns led to controversy and in some cases removal.
  - Detroit proactively authorized a pilot that only allowed PDDs to be used for local food or store deliveries.
- The company that approached MONUM, Starship, operates primarily on college campuses in other cities.
- Some known benefits:
  - Increased access to food, potentially medicine as well.
  - Allows wheelchair users to conserve battery power.
- Some concerns about PDDs that MONUM is aware of already include:
  - Mechanical issues causing devices to stop on the street/sidewalk

- General tension of taking up space on the sidewalk, particularly if it's a narrow sidewalk
- Potential for collision with cars
- One example, from 2019 in Pittsburgh, in which a PDD blocked a curb cut as a wheelchair user was in the crosswalk, and was trapped on the street. In response, the company took all devices offline and made some changes.
- The PDDs are small and low to the ground, which might make them hard to see.
- They do make a sound while crossing streets that is similar to crosswalk alert beeps, but it's unclear how easy it is to differentiate those two sounds.
- PDDs have been trained to recognize many things it would interact with in the public right of way, but unclear what would happen if it didn't recognize something like a particular cane.
- MONUM is considering authorizing a pilot in the Fenway area, particularly covering the colleges there, as well as the edge of the Longwood Medical Area. They would only approve with careful regulation, that would require an application, review, and granting of a license which could be revoked. The application and review process would include:
  - Assessing the area of operation including the sidewalk conditions, size, and quality;
  - Confirmation that the proposal meets requirements for things like appropriate hours of operation, safety features, etc.;
  - Assessing the company including whether they have the appropriate insurance, privacy, and data processes; and
  - Assessing their proposed a public engagement process, e.g. neighborhood groups, pedestrian groups, & disabilities groups.

- Deshpande concluded by stating that MONUM would like to not only avoid sidewalk conflicts, but also use PDDs in a way that helps people with disabilities. For example, in addition to the immediate benefits of using them for delivery, PDDs could map sidewalks and identify maintenance needs.

### Questions from the Board

- Member Lyubovskaya asked if the PDDs would be individually owned, or owned by companies which then dispatch them to clients.
- Deshpande replied that the companies would own them. In this pilot instance they would rent them to the university food distributor(s). Students would then have access to an app to order delivery.
- Member Lyubovskaya also asked how blind people would know how / be instructed to open the storage compartment to access their food.
- Deshpande said that he believes the app that one uses to order food would also allow clients to trigger opening, but he wasn't sure exactly and would check as to the screen reading capabilities of the app and what if any possibility for manual opening there is.
- Member Ireland commented that from the photos the PDDs don't look very Deaf friendly. He commented that flags might help, but would recommend something like a bright strobe light
- Deshpande responded that his understanding is that they do or can have flags and a flashing light, but isn't sure what the brightness is. Some states have required lights be visible from 500 feet. He asked Member Ireland what design specs he would recommend.
- Member Ireland responded that he would recommend requiring the strongest iridescence possible.
- Member Amirhosseini asked about how easy it is to retrieve packages for people who use a wheelchair and when these devices would be operating.

- Deshpande replied that he thinks the company's app pings the device when it arrives at its location and opens the storage container. In addition, he noted that MONUM is aware of the particular concerns of snowy months and so would be open to limiting their use to particular times of the year, or in some other way, based on the Board's recommendations, if they have any.

#### Questions from the Public

- Concetta Paul asked about how the PDDs navigate and operate, and whether they observe traffic lights.
- Deshpande explained that the PDDs have a map, use cameras to detect objects, and use machine learning to compare the camera feed to the map. They also obey all traffic signals. Some are trained to stop at every crosswalk or curb cut, which pings a human operator to manually drive to cross.
- Paul commented that she thinks PDDs should be treated as a vehicle not a pedestrian.

#### **Program Presentation: Me2 Music, Caroline Whiddon**

- Caroline Whiddon is the co-founder and Executive Director of Me2 Music. Me2 Music is the only classical music organization created for musicians living with mental illness and the people who support them.
- She and her husband founded the organization after her husband faced stigma and discrimination as a person living with bipolar disorder. As an orchestra conductor, he wanted to create a safe space to work for all people with mental health diagnoses.
- The organization is dedicated to being stigma free. There are no auditions, no fees, and works to create a welcoming environment. While about half of their musicians have a mental health diagnosis, they accept people without mental health diagnoses, because they believe that they cannot destigmatize

mental health without working with people who do not have such a diagnosis and who want to learn.

- The organization hosts a full orchestra where they were founded, in Vermont. Now that they are headquartered in Boston, they host an ensemble which practices weekly in Dorchester.
- There is an upcoming event at Symphony Hall in January. Whiddon noted that this beautiful space can be intimidating and people might not know that they are welcome. They want to make the event welcoming to all people with disabilities. Many of the traditional practices of performing arts space won't apply. For example, Whiddon states that they won't care when people clap, or if they need to get up and move around during the performance.
  - Me2 Music will be taking advantage of all of the accessibility options at Symphony Hall including assistive listening devices, accessible seating, Braille programs, and encouraging folks to bring their service dogs.
- More information can be found on the organization's website at [me2music.org](http://me2music.org)
- Whiddon concluded by asking if the Advisory Board would be willing to be a community partner for the event, spreading the word through listservs or other outlets. She offered to list the Board as a community partner on publications related to the event.

#### Questions from the Board

- Chair Richard commended Me2 Music for welcoming service dogs, but also noted that people with disabilities often don't bring service dogs to these kinds of loud events to protect their hearing, or if their dogs get nervous in large crowds.

#### **Chair's Report: Olivia Richard**

- There is an upcoming Town Hall regarding One Care, register at [bit.ly/RegisterICTownHall](https://bit.ly/RegisterICTownHall)
- This week is National Influenza Awareness week. The flu is hitting people hard this year, especially with both the flu and COVID-19 together
- For flu vaccines you can visit [vaccines.gov](https://vaccines.gov) and enter your zipcode and you will be able to see options for flu vaccines in your area, in whatever form you prefer.
- Lastly, the special election for the State Senate district that covers East Boston is on December 14th. East Boston residents are encouraged to vote!

### **Member Spotlight:**

*Skipped*

### **Commissioner's Report: Kristen McCosh**

- Mayoral Transition - Commissioner McCosh noted that Mayor Wu was sworn into office on Tuesday November 16th in the City Council chamber. In her speech she noted the accessibility upgrades to that chamber. Mayor Wu oversaw those upgrades when she was Council President and it was great to see her highlight accessibility so early on.
- Restructuring - the current Health and Human Services Cabinet will change back to Human Services, returning all health work to Boston Public Health Commission.
- Outdoor Dining - on-street outdoor dining will end on December 31, 2021 except for the North End which already ended. Restaurants that received one of our temporary ramps can keep them until further notice.
  - A permanent outdoor dining program is being created. All set ups will have to be fully ADA and MAAB compliant. The Commission is working

with other City Departments to make the process as easy as possible for restaurants without sacrificing these requirements.

- COVID-19, Vaccines and Boosters - Mayor Wu appointed a COVID-19 Advisory Committee led by the BPHC and including restaurants, arts and performers, and medical professionals.
  - Omicron variant - be vigilant but calm. Vaccinations remain the best tool to prevent death, severe illness, and spread of COVID.
  - 7 BPHC “family clinics” which serve all residents age 5 and older with any of the doses (first, second, or third) needed.
  - Larger capacity clinics are also being hosted in coming weeks.
  - Reminder that other measures such as masks, social distancing, and ventilation are important to limiting the spread.
- Captions Ordinance - Hearing was held last month. Councilor who chaired that hearing, Ed Flynn, is the incoming Council President. The Commission will be working with him on next steps in the new year. Wesley sent some interesting information about advances in NYC which we are reviewing.
  - Commission’s next steps include developing an outreach plan for businesses and the disability community, laying out parameters like a formal complaint and resolution process, and working with other departments to launch.
- CMS - Last week the Boston Commission and Commissioners from other cities met with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid to advocate for removal of income and asset limits on Medicaid Buy-In programs for working disabled adults, similar to the current program in Massachusetts.
- Second and final Community Access Monitor Training occurred last week and all members who attended should have received their certificate.
- Bike Plan funding will be moving forward with our new Outreach Specialist who starts next week.

- In the beginning of the new year the Board will need to hold Executive Committee elections. The Commissioner encouraged the Board to be ready to make nominations in January for votes in February or March.
- Andrea sent around proposed 2022 meeting dates, keeping our meetings on Wednesday evenings. If there are strong concerns for this time let us know, otherwise that schedule will be finalized.
- Open Jobs - The Commission has filled the Outreach Specialist position, hopes to make an offer for the Parking Manager before the end of the year, and still needs help spreading the word about the In-House ASL Interpreter.
- The City of Boston has many other open jobs, and David Pina from the Office of Human Resources is here to briefly provide more information.
  - Pina started by discussing the City of Boston Career Center ([boston.gov/jobs](http://boston.gov/jobs)), listing some of the largest departments that post positions on that site, the kinds of employment opportunities, and primary job locations. He noted that there are currently 211 jobs posted on that career center which is the most he's ever seen. He encouraged anyone looking for work or a new challenge to apply.
  - He then described the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC)'s departments, types of employment, and locations. There are 94 jobs at BPHC, which are listed at [bphc.org](http://bphc.org).
  - The Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA) has their own job portal as well, with primarily planning, real estate, and financial positions. They can be found at [bostonplans.org](http://bostonplans.org).
  - The Boston Public Schools (BPS) is the last major hiring agency, with 535 jobs available across 122 schools and the Central Office. Jobs are listed at [bostonpublicschools.org](http://bostonpublicschools.org)
- Commissioner McCosh noted that the City of Boston has a non-discrimination policy and anyone can request accommodations in the

application process as well as if hired. She spoke personally about her joy in working in public service and encouraged anyone interested in making a difference to apply to the City.

### **Announcements**

- Member Ireland made a comment following up on the Commissioner's report regarding closed captions in New York City. He noted that AMC announced that all theaters nationwide will have open captions - not that all movies will have them, but all theaters will have some movies with open captions. He noted that the AMC Boston Common location does 1-2 shows per day with open captions, and offers private space for viewing open captions.
  - In addition, he noted that NYC's council had a hearing on an ordinance to require theaters with more than 2 shows to offer captions during both peak and non-peak hours.
  - Commissioner McCosh responded that a working group will be formed for Boston, and will make sure everyone on the Board is in touch with that group when formed. She also noted that Carl is on the Federal Communications Commission's committee for captions regulations.
- Member Boyd reminded meeting attendees that for communications access, it's best practice to identify yourself when speaking, for people who are blind or low-vision.

### **Old Business**

The Mayor Wu letter final draft was in the email of meeting materials for this month for final review. It will be printed and given to the Mayor's Office this week.

### **New Business**

None

**Public Input:**

- Concetta Paul noted that the new MBTA center running bus lanes on Blue Hill Ave are now open and being used. Asks that the Board and the Commission continue to monitor how those work for people with disabilities.

**Adjournment**

A motion to adjourn was made by Member Lyubovskaya, seconded by Member Caron, and the motion was carried. The meeting was adjourned at 6:58pm.